

RPG Reload File 015 – 'Zenonia'

[November 20, 2014](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)

Hello, gentle readers, and welcome back to the **RPG Reload**, our weekly quest to discover the nature of the demon found within our regrets. Each week, we dust off an RPG from the App Store's past to see how it holds up in the futuristic world of today. Whether it's revisiting an old favorite, reflecting on its place in time and space, or just digging in a bit deeper than our reviews typically allow for, this feature gives a chance to break away from the crazy march of releases for a brief second and enjoy a trip to simpler times. I do my best to cover a broad range of RPGs from week to week, but just to help keep things balanced, once per month the choice falls to you, the readers. Simply cast your vote in the comments below, pop into the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#) on the forums, or fire off a tweet to [@RPGReload](#) to let me know what you want to see me play. The next reader's choice article will be **RPG Reload File 017**, which is coming up pretty quickly. There's still no clear winner yet, so get to voting! If you guys don't pick something, I'll just take the week off from writing the column and play old Super Famicom games instead. Don't make me do it!



We're heading into the back half of Origins Month, and it's already been quite the world trip. We started off in Canada with *Baldur's Gate: Enhanced Edition* ([\\$9.99](#)), hopped a kayak to Japan for *Final Fantasy* ([\\$7.99](#)), and now we're swimming across the sea for a brief stop-over in South Korea. While the aforementioned games have undeniable importance to the history of video game RPGs in general, they achieved that well before they arrived on iOS. This week's game, *Zenonia*, may not have started on iOS, but it certainly made its name there, putting developer Gamevil's name on the world map in a big way. It not only spawned a handful of sequels, but it also set off a flood of similar titles. Its influence is such that if you even say mention the KRPG genre, most mobile gamers will immediately picture something just like *Zenonia*. Some of its success is surely owed to timing, as its May 24th, 2009 release date on iOS puts among the first substantial RPGs available on the platform. I suspect a lot more of its success is down to it being a really fun game, packed to the brim with content, yet still easily digestible in small chunks for the gamer on the go.

Zenonia's history starts in 2008 on Korean feature phones, where it was reportedly a big hit. Its developer, Gamevil, has actually been around since

the year 2000, publishing its first mobile game in 2001 through LG Telecom in South Korea, and opened an American office in February of 2006. At that time, they were releasing games on devices like the Blackberry, and like most mobile-exclusive developers in that generation of hardware, their name was very obscure among English gamers, though those that knew of them generally thought highly of the company. They first hit the App Store with *Baseball Superstars 2009*, the third in their series of mobile baseball games. *Zenonia* was their second release, and it caught on in a big way. Even before it released, the hype for the game had already built up to pretty high levels thanks to a strong showing at GDC 2009. Whether or not it lived up to that hype is up to the individual, but it certainly offered a level of depth and quality that resonated well with iOS gamers at the time. It did well enough that Gamevil eventually ported the game to the Nintendo DSi and Sony PSP, a distinction I think it holds alone among their titles.



In as much as *Zenonia* was almost the right game in the right place at the right time, the series has in many ways also walked in step with the App Store's evolution over the last five years. The latest English release in the series, *Zenonia 5* ([Free](#)), came out in January of 2013 and, like its

predecessor *Zenonia 4* ([Free](#)), was free-to-play, with a heavy focus on multiplayer. I may or may not talk about those games way down the road, and they assuredly have their fans, but it's interesting to see how far the series ended up from its roots. Gamevil has released another game in the series this year, *Zenonia Online*, but for the moment it's only available in Korea. It completely throws out the story to focus on the multiplayer aspects, and is intricately tied with *KakaoTalk*, a social networking service popular in that country. The times, they have a-changed, I suppose. We're not here to talk about the series, though, are we? No, this one is going out to that original game that captured the hearts, minds, and teeny-tiny batteries of players over a half-decade ago.

Zenonia is often compared to *Legend Of Zelda*, likely because they're both top-down fantasy action games with adventure elements, block-pushing puzzles, and hard-scrolling environments. *Zelda* is a very popular series that serves a reference point to many gamers, but when we get down to the nuts and bolts of the two games, they don't have a great deal in common. Rather, *Zenonia* is descended from Japanese-style action-RPGs, a sub-genre that seems to originate with Nihon Falcom, the makers of the *Dragon Slayer* and *Ys* series of games. There's far less of a focus on puzzles and finding items to open new pathways, in favor of grinding up levels, solving sub-quests by killing or collecting X number of things, and progressing the story to open up new paths. Is it repetitive? Yes, it very often is, yet somehow, the game does very well in managing to hit that part of the brain that every RPG fan has which overrides all common sense when it comes to grinding. Simply put, the grind in *Zenonia* is well-designed and proves to be a lot of fun in and of itself most of the time, making it not much of a grind at all, if you think about it.



The combat is fast, simple, and fun, with enemies surviving just long enough to make it feel like you're really thrashing on them. As long as you're battling with mobs of an appropriate level, the experience gains are such that you'll level-up pretty frequently, with a handy little bar on the status screen showing you just how close you're getting. Every level-up prompts you to spend some points on your stats and skills, making it a mini-event each time, and you can immediately feel the effects of those gains. Tying in the fact that you're going to have to thump on multiples of each mob anyway to clear out your sub-quests adds to the feeling of progress. On top of that, even your access to new equipment is tied to your level. Leveling up empowers you in a very real way in *Zenonia*. If you can't beat a particular area, I can almost guarantee the answer can be found in a level or two. It's a hamster wheel, to be sure, but you know something? Hamster wheels look really fun and if I had a giant hamster wheel, I'd definitely take a few spins on it each day. I'd also be down for one of those big water bottles where you lick the metal ball to make a few drops come out. That would be classy.

It's not strictly about the grind, either. There's a story playing out as you level yourself up, and although it's quite cliched, it's told in a fun and humorous

way. There are two narrative branches to take through the game, good or evil, a choice that mostly comes down to the choices you make in key cut-scenes. The localization is ridiculously sophomore at times, which I think speaks clearly to the size of Gamevil's American branch at the time. You'll probably wince more than once at the sudden and awkward blue language or failed attempts at adding dialects, and depending on your sense of humor, you may or may not appreciate the game's constant urge to kick the fourth wall down. That said, it has personality, and I'll gladly take a sometimes-awkward localization with a sense of humor over a dry, overly-literal one. The named cast of characters is fairly memorable, with the hero, Regret, being almost impossible to dislike.



Zenonia is a really long game if you have a mind towards completing everything in it, with a touted length of 40 hours that it actually runs right past by 10 or so hours. If you're just focusing on reaching the end, you're still looking at a playtime of over 20 hours. There are also three different character classes to play as, each with their own sets of skills and weapons. There's an awful lot of padding in there, but that's the nature of the game. What's surprising is how fast the time goes by once you get into the groove

of the game. You'll head out, knock out a few quests, run out of supplies or need to turn in some quests, teleport back to town, get some new pieces of gear, and either head back out or call it a day. Eventually, you'll be strong enough to punch through whatever story goal you were working on, giving you access to new areas. Sometimes, it's just a run for the sake of improving your character. Either way, progress was made. It's a quality that lends itself particularly well to handheld RPGs.

This same strength can sometimes become a weakness if you prefer to play your RPGs in long sessions. The fact of the matter is, *Zenonia's* gameplay doesn't change much at all during that long haul. That's great for interrupted play because it's pretty hard to forget what you're supposed to do, but the longer you go at it, the more it begins to wear at you. It makes an earnest effort to change things up whenever you encounter a boss, but those sequences are a rare shake of spice on a game that otherwise consists of putting your back to the wall and hammering attack until things are suitably dead. Other elements of the game also become a lot more irritating when you're playing for a while, like the hunger gauge that cuts your magic bar down to size if you don't regularly eat food. I have no problem with using hunger as a gameplay element when it adds to the strategy. For example, in *Shiren The Wanderer*, you have a very limited inventory, food can often be scarce depending on your luck, and hunger will kill you if you don't manage it. In *Zenonia*, on the other hand, food items are both plentiful and cheap, so I'm not really sure why hunger is even part of the game.



This is normally the part of the feature where I talk about how well the app holds up these days. I can do that, but I have to start by saying that during the process of working on this edition of **RPG Reload**, *Zenonia* appears to have been removed from the App Store, leaving only the Lite version, which lets you play up until the first boss. The game can still be downloaded from your purchase history if you already bought it, but if you haven't, you're out of luck. There don't seem to be any technical issues with the game, as it plays fine on my iPhone 5S, but the game and its first two sequels are all gone without a trace.

Perhaps that's not surprising, as the app is over five years old and hasn't received an update in nearly four years, but it's still a shame. Even with black frames and non-retina graphics, it's still a very fun experience. I guess we can call this **RPG Reload** a memorial to one of the great pioneers of the RPG genre on iOS. If you still want to play *Zenonia*, you can purchase it on Nintendo DSiWare on your DSi or 3DS, or from PSN for your PSP, Vita, or PS3. You may want to act quickly, though, as the game also appears to have been removed from the Google Play store. I'm guessing it's more than tech problems. Perhaps they want players to pick up the F2P installments instead.



Well, *Zenonia*, you fine little beast of mobile origins, I salute you. Hopefully, we'll see you again someday, because you are a pretty fun game even today. That's just my opinion of the game, though. What do you guys think of *Zenonia*? It was a pretty big hit around TouchArcade back in the day, so some of our readers must have stories to tell. Share them in the comments below, and please don't forget to vote for the next reader's choice while you're at it, because we seriously do not have a winner yet. You can also leave your thoughts in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#) or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#). As for me, I'll be back next week with another RPG classic, and this time, I'll try not to kill the poor game. As always, thanks for reading!

Next Week's Reload Hint: *So it's a bird-blade?*